

Two Poets of the Peasantry

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mud is not to smear it on one's canvas. It is
strange that
we should still need lessons in taste from a
Boeotian
ploughman of 850 B.C.

Yet those who read Hesiod do not go to
him so much
for his brief glimpses of other human
figures, nor even
for his visions of the Gods, lovely though
some of these
are; as when he meets the Muses, or in a
moment of
despair foresees the final flight of
goodness from a
distracted world:

Kod 7676 Sf] irp6s "OAunTTov onri x^v&S

e&pvo8gir|\$

AeuKoTcjiv 9apfecrcn KaAuvyaijiEvco XP^a KaAov

ddav6<TCOv JJ16T& q>OAov πOV TpoXnr6vr*

dvdpcbirouj

AtSdb\$ «al Nipecns.

Then to Olympus from the wide-wayed earth,

Wrapping white mantles round their

loveliness,

To join the Immortals, from the sons of men

Honour and Righteousness shall flee away.

This poem lives partly because its author
has left us,
unintentionally and by the way, one vivid
portrait—his
own. It lives still more, I think, because this
man who
seems so loveless towards brother or
countryman, wife
or friend, had yet one hidden passion,
hidden perhaps
even from himself; a passion for the hard
earth and the
harsh calling to which in return for a
niggard livelihood
he devoted a life of perpetual toil. The
ordered march of
the seasons, the earth which he does not
idly call 'divine'
—X06va Slav—the cunning framework of
the plough
that furrows it, the little signs and voices
from cloud and
hedgerow that mark the farmer's calendar

—all these he
describes with a sober, yet eager
earnestness that may
look prosaic, but makes seem almost
frivolous and ama-
teurish, beside its grey reality, even the
passionate herds-
men of Theocritus and the perfect cadences of
the *Georgics*,
the shepherds of Spenser and the
countryfolk of Words-
worth. Most of these last indeed have a
little straw of